DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 231 EA 025 868

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TITLE Year-Round Schools: The Star of the Sea Model.
INSTITUTION Pacific Region Educational Lab., Honolulu, HI.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE May 94
CONTRACT RP91002009
NOTE 6p.
AVAILABLE FROM Pacific Region Educational Laboratory, 828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500, Honolulu, HI 96813.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT Educational Innovations in the Pacific; v1 n1 May 1994

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Catholic Schools; Elementary Education; Extended School Day; *Extended School Year; *Flexible Scheduling; *School Schedules; Vacation Programs; *Year Round Schools

ABSTRACT

Star of the Sea School, located in the Wai'alae-kahala area of Honolulu, implemented year-round schooling (YRS) in 1991. This publication describes the history of YRS, the status of YRS in the Pacific region, and outcomes of the Star of the Sea's program. The private Catholic K-8 school adheres to a 45-10 plan, which includes 180 regular school days and 6 weeks in the summer available for summer school or a longer vacation period. Since implementation, the school has gained over 100 new students, engaged a high level of community support, created a space during intersessions for unique classes, raised money with intersession classes, and created a higher level of school spirit. Supporters of the plan say that students retain material better and cover more material; teachers and students experience less fatigue (because of the frequent breaks); and students gain practice in social interaction. Disadvantages are that the plan creates scheduling problems for parents who have children in other schools and adhere to traditional summer plans and for teachers who want to take summer university courses. The school minimizes these problems by being open 11 hours a day, even during intersession, and allowing teachers time off. The overall parental response to the plan has been positive. (LMI)

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ED 370 231

Educational
Innovations
in the Pacific

Volume 1, Number 1 | PACIFIC REGION EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY | May 1994

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Introduction

Star of the Sea School has had its share of challenges, from its humble beginning in 1946 to its current role as a school that shines brightly as a model for other Pacific schools. Nestled in the Wai'alae-Kahala area of Honolulu, Star of the Sea, a private Catholic K-8 school, sparkles with enthusiastic and creative energy. This is clearly a place where things are happening. Exciting things.

Star of the Sea's principal, Darla DeVille, has been a proactive force by applying cutting-edge educational research. Her vision of year-round schooling (YRS) has provided the school a new direction, and a new lease on life. Previous to YRS, Star of the Sea had problems that needed immediate attention: enrollment was slipping, community and school spirit was waning, and in 1989 the high school closed.

To Darla, year-round schooling is not merely going to school all year, but rather is "participatory education at its highest level. It allows students, parents and teachers the flexibility to provide quality education within the core curriculum, while maintaining a high level of academic excellence. It provides the entire community an opportunity to continue to learn and grow together on a year round basis."

Darla DeVille deeply believes in the ability of year-round schooling to enhance student/teacher attitudes, community involvement, student performance, and the curriculum. She uses year-round schooling to unify many facets of educational theory and practice into a cohesive philosophy of education.

Discovering the concept while attending graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, she researched the subject thoroughly, used it, and became a firm believer in its power to transform schools. When she was hired by Star of the Sea they were losing enrollment. Now, three years later, they have gained over one hundred new students, successfully engaged a high level of community support, created a space during intercessions for unique and exciting classes, raised money with intercession classes, and created almost unparalleled school spirit. Year-round schooling is obviously much more than going to school all year long.

History of Year-Round Schools

The idea of year-round education is hardly new. In 1645, in Dorchester, Massachusetts children attended school all year, for the first seven months from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and for the last five months, giving them a respite, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Year-round schools became relatively popular during the 1800s, particularly for the purpose of assimilating immigrant children into the American culture more quickly (Zykowski, Mitchell, Hough, & Gavin).

During the early twentieth century there were many other examples of year-round education. These experiments were undertaken in order to address a number of concerns including overcrowding, financial problems, and declining academic achievement. These models became the precursors of the systems we have today. In the 1960s, in order to combat rising costs and enrollments, and to better utilize school facilities, the school district of Valley View, Illinois piloted a 45 days on, 15 days off plan (often referred to as 45-15). This plan, and slightly modified versions of it, has become the most

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prevalent model of year round schooling to date.

By 1976 there were six hundred schools on this plan nationwide, and it has remained the most popular plan nationwide (Howell). The 45-15 plan, as well as other schedules (60-20, 60-15, 90-30, trimester, quarter, quinmester, Concept 6, five track-five term, and flexible all-year) can be used with single track or multitrack plans.

A single track plan is often used when there is no enrollment problem, but a school wishes to enhance performance. In this plan, all students follow the same schedule. A multitrack plan, by contrast, is used specifically to address school overcrowding. In this plan students are divided into groups which then overlap in their schooling, leaving a portion (often 2/3 - 3/4) of the students in the facilities at any given time.

Currently there are more than 1.4 million students in 366 districts in 32 states involved in year-round schooling, and the number is rapidly increasing (Harp).

Year-Round Schooling in the Pacific

In the Pacific Region, as well as many other places, the concept of year-round schooling is being looked at seriously as an alternative to the traditional schedule, a schedule based solely on an agricultural model and sorely out of date. No longer do students need the summers off to help plant and harvest crops. It is the feeling of many educators that year-round education better fits the requirements of the information age.

Pacific history with year-round schooling began six years ago with Waihe'e Elementary on Maui. Since then, several other public schools (Kilohana on Molokai, and Palau High School and Meyuns Elementary School, both of Palau), and three private schools (Star of the Sea, Cathedral, and Trinity Lutheran) have adopted year-round programs. Several other Hawaii schools (Ha'aheo, Ka'ewai, Helemano, Maunaloa, and Kahuku) are planning to begin year-round schooling during the summer of 1994. In addition, there are at least fifty Hawaii public schools, as well as schools in Guam and the CNMI, that are actively researching and considering the idea.

Year-Round Schooling at Star of the Sea School

Darla DeVille freely admits that she pushed Star of the Sea into year-round schooling by influencing the teachers and school board to accept the idea. In retrospect, she wishes she'd brought the community in on the planning stages, but at the time she felt an urgent need to act quickly. In Hawaii public schools, with School/Community-Based Management in place, the entire school community would organically be involved in such decisions from the beginning.

Star of the Sea devised their own innovative hybrid of the 45-15 plan to best meet the needs of their school community. Their plan divides the year into four nine-week terms, separated by three two-week vacation or intercession periods. The 45-10 plan, a "gentler" plan than the 45-15, leaves six weeks in the summer for summer school or a longer vacation period (Star of the Sea brochure). Regular school is in session 180 days a year, the same as traditional school. With intercession and summer school classes, the total possible number of school days is 228.

The transition from a traditional schedule to year-round schooling is not easy. "It requires more work from everyone, more commitment," says Barbara McInerney, office secretary, "but the initial break is the most difficult, since it requires new methods and systems to replace the old way of doing business."

Intercession classes impact support staff by increasing work flow, particularly with regard to the organization, registration, and accounting required by intercession classes. But it is that very work and commitment that gives the school community a sense of ownership and pride in their school. And appropriate pay raises are certainly a warranted option. "In spite of the difficulty, we have not lost a teacher. We did have two families leave the school, but both returned the following fall and brought friends into the school with them," says Darla.

Test Scores

A commonly asked question is: Does year-round schooling increase test scores? A 1991 San Diego study showed, reading, language and math scores in year-round elementary schools improved more than those in traditional schools (Alcorn). While this is an important question, to Darla it is not the priority. "If we can create an exciting, enthusiastic learning environment with year-round schooling, I feel we have done our job."

In fact, although there has been no study of test scores per se at Star of the Sea, there is other evidence that year-round schooling has influenced learning. Since breaks are not as long, there is less time for students to forget what they have learned, and retention is better. This is empirically demonstrable by the amount of material covered each year, which has increased. Considerably less time is needed on review, and there is the chance to place students in remedial or enrichment classes every intercession, rather than having to wait until summer school, which yields a more consistent flow of learning. A continuous schedule promotes

continuous achievement and challenges for gifted and talented, disadvantaged, migrant, and limited- or non-English speaking students (Hawkins). Many sources report that with frequent breaks there is less student and teacher fatigue. Joe Scrofani, a teacher at Star of the Sea, says, "For kids, this is education as it should be."

In addition to the academic gain, there is also a social gain. "Kids forget how to act in school over summer break. They need to review social interactions the same way they review academic lessons," says Darla. Year-round school makes for a more continuous flow. There is less forgotten, and hence less time spent playing catch-up.

Intercessions

"The school calendar is a calendar of possibilities," Darla says. "The calendar opens doors." Intercessions at schools that have gone to year-round calendars have become a time to explore some of the possibilities of the school structure, in addition to making extremely good use of the facilities.

Star of the Sea offers an array of intercession options, featuring morning, afternoon, and full-day classes that last one or two weeks. Intercession classes are often based on themes, and are often used as a way of involving community members in the school by offering them a chance to teach electives such as Hawaiiana, gardening, arts and crafts, and alternative sports, such as surfing and rock climbing. Subject experts, including university professors and members of the business community, have taught accelerated and enrichment classes, directed career exploration, or led field trips. Remedial classes in all subject areas are standard, and offer the student who has fallen behind the chance to catch up immediately, without waiting for summer school. The classes are less formal, more hands-on, and more related to "real life" than traditional school, providing a model of education that is fun, connected, and exciting. And there is always the option of just kicking back and taking a well-deserved rest or vacation.

Some Drawbacks to Year-Round Schooling

While problems due to year-round schooling are relatively rare at Star of the Sea, they do exist. The alternative schedule of year-round schools can create problems for parents in the areas of child care and traditional summer plans. As one parent, who has additional children in other schools, commented, "It is difficult to adjust schedules to fit both sets of children."

Star of the Sea has attempted to minimize these problems by their commitment and responsiveness to the needs of parents and children. The school is open eleven hours a day, even during intercession. The cafeteria opens at 6:30 a.m. and after-school care continues until 5:30 p.m. Daily enrichment classes are offered from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. The school has granted leaves to both students and teachers who simply couldn't resolve problems any other way.

Another concern comes from teachers who wish to take university classes or workshops during the summer. While this can be a problem, Star of the Sea has allowed teachers the time off if they need it. Their six week summer break also coincides with the university's first summer session. As year-round schooling gains additional momentum, university and other class schedules will eventually become more responsive. For schools considering the change, it is important to be flexible and provide support for students or teachers who might find themselves in unique situations.

Other Parent Feedback

Parents at Star of the Sea have given overwhelmingly positive response to year-round schooling. Teachers, parents, and students all comment on how kids get bored during long summer vacations, and how the shorter summer break has helped stimulate children's curiosity toward learning. "My kids are excited to return to school," one parent commented. "A six week break is long enough. Any more than that and they get bored." Another parent, whose child is asthmatic and missed a lot of school, said that for the first time, thanks to the intercession remedial classes, her child is staying caught up and above average. The results of national surveys of parents who currently have children in YRE (year-round education) have shown that the majority of these parents support YRE (Hawkins).

In addition to the obvious academic benefits, and the opportunities that intercession offers, many parents view the additional seasonal travel options positively. No more do they need to take vacations only in the summer months, or face the consequence of pulling their children out of school for a spring or autumn adventure. And yet others were excited about the opportunities to teach intercession classes, and thus become involved and add something to their children's school.

Overall, the opinion is that year-round schooling is a growing trend, and that as more schools adopt the model, many of the logistical problems that exist today will be ameliorated.

Conclusion

Year-round schooling may seem very foreign to our calendar model of education. Yet just because something has been with us for hundreds of years doesn't mean we should continue to use it. The conditions of our lives have never changed more rapidly than they are changing now, and one of the necessary conditions of our time is flexibility and adaptability. Critical perception involves knowing when an existing paradigm is no longer useful. This seems to be the case with traditional school calendars.

The fact that Star of the Sea is a private school certainly allowed it greater flexibility to adopt year-round schooling quickly, however this situation is changing. With the advent of School/Community-Based Management and lump-sum budgeting, both of which return school control to the local level, many Pacific public schools will also have the flexibility required to make rapid changes. It seems there is no better time to begin exploring what year-round education can do for your school.

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This publication was produced with funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract number RP91002009. The content does not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.